CURRENT SITUATION
As the Arab Spring’s birthplace and its sole fledgling democracy, Tunisia represents an encouraging yet incomplete victory against authoritarian rule and violent extremism. Tunisia’s sustained progress since the 2011 revolution makes it a strong democratic partner in a volatile region. However, an economic crisis, political disaffection, and the inherent difficulties of a major political and social transition continue to threaten the country’s stability.

USIP’S WORK
Since 2012, USIP’s peacebuilding programs have worked with local partners to empower Tunisians to safeguard their democratic gains and reduce violent extremism and fragility through inclusive governance, dialogue, and security sector reform. The Institute also conducts research that promotes policy development while convening key leaders in Tunisia and Washington.

Localized Peacebuilding Processes with National Impact.
Drawing from its pioneering work in local conflict resolution and violence prevention, USIP established the Alliance of Tunisian Facilitators (ATF) in 2014. Together, USIP and ATF develop and implement field-tested peacebuilding processes in key locations where local conflicts have national and international implications. The ATF includes lawyers, journalists, civil society leaders, and other professionals who understand local conflict dynamics and the causes of tension. USIP empowers these community leaders to peacefully and constructively resolve underlying conflicts that affect the community’s and nation’s stability. Examples of ATF’s peacebuilding work include:

Convening Top Officials and Experts
USIP hosts Tunisia’s most prominent officials and experts in Washington for events that focus on improving security, reducing extremism, and curbing corruption. Recent guests include President Beji Caid Essebsi, Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, Foreign Minister Khemaies Jhinaoui, and Sheikh Rachid Ghannouchi.
Tataouine: In early 2017, Tataouine residents organized demonstrations to protest natural resource governance and revenue allocation practices. The demonstrations forced gas operations to shut down—further damaging the economy—until the government struck a deal in June 2017. ATF and USIP work with the governor and key stakeholders in municipalities across Tataouine, including the main labor and agriculture unions, political parties, associations, business, and local government representatives to collectively address the governance challenges that led to the 2017 uprising.

Dour Hichar: In this marginalized community, high levels of recruitment by extremist organizations have been met with a heavy-handed security response that is often cited as contributing to the community’s fragility. USIP and its local partners are building resiliency by empowering women from the community to reintegrate families who have been alienated due to ties with extremists and to work with local authorities on the drivers of radicalization.

Medenine: ATF’s work in Medenine addresses one of the major triggers of conflict in Tunisia: the violent relationship between civilians and security forces in marginalized communities, particularly youth. USIP brought together at-risk youth, city elders, local unions, and police to discuss the cycle of violence and create local mechanisms for communication between youth and police before conflicts become violent.

Ben Gerdane: On the border with Libya, the town of Ben Gerdane was the site of an ISIS insurgency in 2016. USIP’s conflict analysis of Ben Gerdane revealed post-revolution policies affecting informal trade to be one of the main drivers of conflict and fragility in the area. USIP and its local partner in Ben Gerdane are working with the municipal council, the governor’s office, and informal traders on marketplace renovations, the legal recognition of traders in Ben Gerdane, and border management practices that build confidence and reduce violent responses not only in Ben Gerdane but across the country’s south.

 Supporting Community-Focused Policing. Internal security forces are on the front lines of Tunisia’s political transition. They are critical to protecting communities and deepening their trust in elected governance after decades of authoritarian rule. To sustain Tunisia’s democratic institutions, the nation’s security forces need to become inclusive, citizen-centric, skilled in handling emerging security challenges such as violent extremism, and proactive in institutionalizing reforms.

With these objectives in mind, USIP supports the Tunisian National Police and the National Guard in reforming their training management, pedagogical approaches, and curricula. The Institute conducted a comprehensive assessment of training systems and is providing technical assistance as they transform their training systems to develop a professional, community-oriented security service.

USIP’s Justice and Security Dialogue program also works in Tunisia to build trust and cooperation among Tunisian citizens. This transparent, participatory dialogue allows Tunisian citizens and security forces to jointly identify and address local and national security challenges.

Improving Regional Border Security. Across the Maghreb, USIP has worked with leaders to enhance border security cooperation. The Institute brought together ministry officials and border guards from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia for a series of workshops to develop a strategic action plan. The final document was disseminated to the U.S. State Department and the Global Counterterrorism Forum.